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Washington D.C. – In a letter to Congress yesterday, Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner warned of the threat posed to military pay as the debt ceiling is reached. Bipartisan legislation introduced by Congressman Duncan Hunter would guarantee that, in the event the debt limit is reached or a lapse in federal appropriations, all military families, in addition to civilians working in combat zones, continue to receive paychecks.

“Military families deserve knowing that their paychecks will not be withheld due to foreseeable holdups with the debt limit debate,” said Congressman Hunter. “These families already have enough to worry about, especially those with loved ones in Afghanistan or other places of danger. The last thing they need to be thinking about is whether their paychecks will arrive on time. Congress must do what’s right and ensure our military is kept out of the political debate so that it can stay focused on what matters most: winning in Afghanistan and returning home safely.”

The Guarantee Paychecks for America’s Military Families Act would establish the following as payment priorities if the debt limit is reached: The payment of interest on the debt to prevent a technical default; the payment of strictly uniformed military members wherever they are serving; and the payment of military and civilian defense personnel serving in combat zones. Additionally, the legislation provides the Department of Treasury the latitude to use money from the general fund to make sure the military is paid in the event of a lapse in appropriations.

Geithner now estimates that sufficient federal revenue for government operations will be available until August 2011, despite reaching the debt ceiling sometime around May 16th. Geithner’s letter specifically lists “military salaries” among the federal programs that would “have to be stopped, limited or delayed” as the debt ceiling is reached.